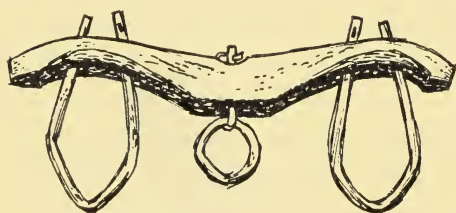


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Jokes Told by Lincoln.

(Springfield, 1960)

# LINCOLN ROOM




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# JOKES TOLD BY LINCOLN

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Selected from old books and papers in the  
Illinois State Historical Library by  
Hallie H. Holt

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“That reminds me of a story.”

Lincoln while president was down with a severe cold. A senator had called to express his sympathy.

“Well, I expect colds,” said Lincoln, glancing at his long feet. “There’s so much of me on the ground you know.”

Books by this same author-

**THE YOUNG PIONEERS**, 226 pages- profusely illustrated, adventure and nature story of hunting and fishing, trapping and camping for the boy scout age. \$2.75 pospaid.

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**THE STRANGE DESTINY OF LINCOLN**, an illustrated 16 page phamplet telling of the most unusal destiny of Lincoln. 40. cents. pospaid.

Hallie H.Holt 419 South College  
Springfield Illinois



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SPRINGFIELD ILLINOIS





"That reminds me of a story." become a Lincoln trademark. He used his great fountain of humor as a safety valve when the pressure of his duties during the war were almost more than he could bear. No doubt he recalled how his unfortunate love affairs and the death of Ann Rutledge had so nearly wrecked his mind and he knew he must not let such happen again.

Often his cabinet was disgusted by his taking time out to tell a story during important meetings; but no doubt Lincoln also knew his stories helped to break their tension and maintain their equilibrium. For although Lincoln was unconscious of it, he was a natural psychiatrist.

Many of the jokes he used in his law practice were very crude and would be utterly unsuited for the courts of today. Spread-eagle oratory was the fashion and the man that could shout the loudest at the judge and jury was often considered the best lawyer.

Many of his jurors could neither read nor write and his crude jokes, or fables as we might call them, made plain to the frontiersmen the meaning of the law and nature of the case.

But Lincoln knew a change in legal oratory was coming. At Cincinnati in 1855 he was present and heard Edwin M. Stanton's argument in the great reaper case. Stanton had perhaps spent three weeks in preparing his argument which he delivered in about three hours. Lincoln listened spellbound. When it was concluded he remarked to a friend.

"I'm going home to study law."

"But you are already at the top of your profession in Springfield," said the friend.

"Ah yes," he answered. "I do occupy a good position but the college trained lawyers are at far west as Cincinnati now. They study their cases as we never do. 'I'm going home to study law. I can be as good as any of them, and when they get to Illinois I will be ready for them.'"

---

Lincoln always had appropriate answers. Once when he and Peter Cartright were opponents for congress Lincoln attended one of his fiery revivals. Reverend Cartright asked all to stand that desired to go to heaven. All stood up but Lincoln.

"Mr. Lincoln, don't you want to go to heaven?" he asked amazed.

"Oh no," said Lincoln. "I want to go to congress."

Abe wrote a few poems some of which were found among his note books.

Abraham Lincoln is my name  
And with my pen I wrote the same;  
I wrote in both haste and speed  
And left it here for fools to read.



Other verses written in youth:—

Abraham Lincoln  
His hand and pen,  
He will be good  
But God knows when.

Good boys who to their books apply,  
Will be great men by and by.

Then when 37 years old he wrote a beautiful poem of ten verses entitled "Memory," describing a visit to his old Kentucky home. Here is the first verse only.

"My childhood's home I see again,  
And sadden with the view;  
And still as memory crowds my brain,  
There's pleasure in it, too."

---

Lincoln once asked to tell the story of his life replied with a single line of Grey's Elegy, "The short and simple annals of the poor,— tells it all." he answered.

The fact is Lincoln was not any poorer than most of his neighbors but he was more ambitious to do something about it. He took a job tending a ferry across the Ohio and his only passenger, for the whole day, was telling him the story of George Washington throwing a Dollar across the Rappahannock.

"Well," sadly remarked Lincoln, "He couldn't throw one across the Ohio here unless he was doing more business than I am, unless he stole it.



In 1837, when Lincoln was licensed to practice law, his old friend John T. Stuart of the Black Hawk war become his law partner. As Lincoln left New Salem for Springfield all he had was a pair of saddle bags, two or three books and a few well worn clothes. He rode a borrowed horse. When he arrived he found a single bedstead would cost \$17. A young merchant, Joshua F. Speed offered to set him up on credit. But Lincoln said, "If I fail in law, I will probably never pay you at all. Then Speed said, "I will share with you my own room."

"Where is it?" asked Lincoln,

"Up these stairs," said Speed.

Lincoln took his saddle bags up to the room then come back down. "Well Speed, I'm moved." he said.

---

After Ann Rutledge died Abe almost lost his reason. One dark rainy night they found him by her grave crying. "I cannot bear to think of the cold rain falling upon her."

You have now visited his home, and have perhaps walked the streets of New Salem and almost felt you were in the presence of that great and humble spirit. When you begin to study the trials he went through, you realize the terrible price he has paid for his immortal name. He, in principle and act, was the greatest and truest Christian that ever lived in the white house.

Lincoln was always conscientious in his love affairs.



When discussing marriage with Mary Owens. here is a paragraph from his letter. "I am afraid you would not be satisfied. There is a great deal of flourishing about in carriages here which

would be your doom without sharing it. You would have to be poor without the means of hiding your poverty. Do you believe you could bear that patiently?" Unfortunately none of Mary Owen's letters have ever been found.

---

When Lincoln began the practice of law one of the judges kept bantering him about trading horses. They agreed that the next morning at 9 o'clock they would make the trade in front of the court house. The horses to be unseen until that hour and no backing out under a penalty of twenty five dollars.

At the designated hour the judge led out an old, poor blind horse that could hardly walk.

The crowd was greatly enjoying the joke when Lincoln arrived carrying a wooden saw horse.

Lincoln dropped it and sit down upon it.

"Well judge," he exclaimed, "this is the first time I ever got the worst of it in a horse trade."

---

Lincoln often used his stories to get out of embarrassing positions. When General Bates was objecting to his appointing of a judge to a responsible position he replied. "Now Bates, he's not nearly so bad as you think. He did me a favor once. When I was walking the circuit he overtook me in his carriage.

"Here Lincoln, hop in," he said. "I know you're going to the court house."

Well I got in and the judge continued to study his papers. The carriage hit a stump at the side of the road and almost turned over. I looked out and saw the driver was reeling in his seat, so I remarked, "Judge I think your driver inbibed too much this morning."

The judge looked out and in anger shouted, "You low down infernal scoundrel of a driver, you are intoxicated."

"The coachman fumbling with his lines, answered with great gravity, "Begorra judge, that's the first rightful decision that you have made in the last twelve months."

---

A group of clergymen came into Lincoln's office and asked him to appoint them chaplains in the army. He knew he did not have the authority.

"You gentlemen put me in the same difficulty in which I once found a little ducky who was playing in the mud.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

"I'm making a church. See the steps, the steeple and the pulpit?"

"All very good" I said. "Now you must make a preacher."

"Cant," he said, "Aint got no more mud."

---

Here is the rather crude type of story that was always relished by the loafers who followed Abe about to hear his stories. A lawyer was cross examining in court a woman who lived on a farm.

"Now you have sworn that your son worked on the farm ever since he was born. Now just what work did he perform at the age of six months?"

"He milked." she replied

---

The lawyers played a great many crude jokes upon each other in Lincoln's day. Lincoln had an opponent who happened to have a worn out trousers seat. Some devilish lawyer in time of Court was passing a subscript-

ion for funds to buy the unfortunate new trousers. When it came to Lincoln he wrote, "I refuse to subscribe to the end in view."

---

Lincoln was always receiving severe criticisms about the way he was conducting the war.

"Grant is a drunkard," complained a hostile delegation.

"So Grant gets drunk, does he?" queried Lincoln.

"He does and we can prove it," was the hot reply.

"Well then, as a favor to me," said Lincoln, "will you find out what brand of whiskey Grant drinks. I want to send a barrel to each of my generals."

---

When Lincoln and Douglas were having their famous debates, Douglas remarked that his father was a cooper by trade. They all knew that Douglas drank a great deal with the crowds.

When Lincoln's time came to reply he said, "I have been aware that the father of Douglas was a cooper and one of the very best." Then pointing at Douglas, he finished, "He has made one of the finest whisky kegs I have ever seen."

Soon in their debates they had another clash about whiskey. Douglas stated that when he first met the honorable Mr. Lincoln he was a grocery clerk. That he sold drygoods, tobacco and whiskey. Said Douglas, "Lincoln was a very good bar tender."

Then Lincoln replied, "All that Mr. Douglas said is true. I did keep a grocery selling drygoods, tobacco and whiskey and Mr. Douglas was one of my best customers. But I have long since left my side of the bar while Mr. Douglas still stays by his."

Some of Lincoln's friends were discussing the shortness of some people.

"How long should a man's leg be?" some one asked Lincoln.

"Well," he said, "It should be at least long enough to reach the floor,"

---

A delegation was petitioning Lincoln to appoint a man commissioner of the Sandwich Islands. Among the many reasons for giving him this job they also said he was in poor health.

"Sorry," said Lincoln, "I have eight other applicants that are all sicker than your man."

---

Lincoln had a case that was soon coming up before Judge Davis. While the judge and some lawyers were visiting between trials, Lincoln quietly asked a leading question about a certain court practice. The judge obligingly answered it and gave his views.

"I am glad you have taken that stand," said Lincoln. "For I have a case coming up in the morning and that is the very thing I have to present. I am glad to find the court will be on my side."

---

Lincoln was against the Mexican war. In a speech he declared that those who argued that the war was not a war of aggression, reminded him of the greedy farmer in Illinois who declared, "I am not greedy 'bout land. I only want what jines mine."

---

A foreign diplomat saw Lincoln shining his own shoes.

"Well Mr. President, do you shine your own shoes?"

"Yes," replied Lincoln. "Whose do you black?"





### Why Lincoln Grew Whiskers

Up until Lincoln was elected president he kept his face clean shaven. A little school girl, Grace Bedell of Westfield, New York saw his picture during the political campaign and decided his homely and bare face would look better if he had whiskers. She wrote a letter telling him she thought he would make a good president but would look better if he would let his whiskers grow.

Lincoln wrote the little girl a nice letter in reply. After the election when he was on his way to Washington to be inaugurated, his train stopped at Westfield.

There was a large gathering about the depot and Lincoln asked Ex Lieutenant Governor Patterson to ask if little Miss Grace Bedell was present. She came forward shyly pushing her way through the crowd.

The President caught her up and kissed her.

"Now you can see how I look with whiskers," he said. "I took your advice."

The multitude burst forth with wild demonstration of cheering as he held her up to be seen.

When Lincoln was elected president he was a young and strong man. After the four years of the terrible civil war his photographs show him to be a very tired old man with the weight of a broken nation resting upon his shoulders. As the war closed, he remarked to a friend, "I am very sure that if I do not go away from here a wiser man, I shall go away a better man from having learned here what a very poor sort of man I am."

In his darkest days of the rebellion he explained to a friend his reason for levity and his telling of funny jokes. "I laugh because I must not cry; thats all, thats all."

---

Lincoln once told of having a dream. He thought he was in the midst of a large assembly of people which opened to let him through.

"He is a common looking fellow." said one of them.

"Friends," he answered in his dreaming, "the Lord prefers common looking people- that is why he made so many of them."

---

Lincoln was so lenient about discipline that it greatly disturbed his generals. Many soldiers court-martialed for disobedience, using his presidential authority, he pardoned them.

"If the good Lord has given a man a cowardly pair of legs," he reasoned, "it is hard to keep them from running away with him."

In fact Lincoln's heart was so tender, he made it a standing order that any person wanting to see him about any soldier, sentenced to be shot for some serious

offence, he should be allowed to hear them, even if Senators and Representatives must wait. Once he explained, "I feel rested if after a hard days work I can find some good reason to save some poor boy's life. I go to bed happy as I think of the joy of his family and friends. For what possible damage can this boy be to the cause of the Union? I say turn him loose."

Of one soldier sentenced to be shot for falling asleep on post, Lincoln said, "I find this boy had fought all day long bravely in the front lines. It is no wonder he went to sleep. He is a country boy used to going to bed at dark. I cannot think of having his blood upon my hands. He must be returned to the army."

Shortly after this boy was found dead, killed in action upon the battlefield of Fredricksburg with a photograph of the President in his inner pocket upon which was written, "God bless Abraham Lincoln."

---

Just before Lincoln left Springfield for Washington he made his last visit to his old dingy office. He dropped down upon their old couch and said to his law partner, "Billy, you and I have been together for more than twenty years and have never passed a word. Will you let my name stay on the old sign until I come back from Washington?"

With tears in his eyes Herndon put out his hand, "Abe," said he, "I never will have any other partner while you live." And until after Lincoln's assassination the old sign still hung above their office.

---

Lincoln purchased his first pair of spectacles in Bloomington when 47 years old. "I kinder needed them," he said. They cost him 37 and one-half cents.

Abe was always a stickler for honesty. He believed if a man was once caught being crooked, the people would loose confidence in him forever. In a speech once discussing honesty and people he said, "It is true that you may fool all of the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all of the time; but you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

---

In Offutt's store in New Salem, a woman bought some articles amounting to about \$2.20. Later when checking over his accounts he found he had charged some six cents too much. At night he closed the store and walked three miles to return the money.

Another time a customer come in and bought one-half lb of tea. The next morning he discovered a four ounce weight on the scales. He closed the store and took another long walk of several miles to deliver the tea.

---

A hard and severe business man in Springfield determined to sue a poor man for a small account of \$2.50 and wanted Lincoln to take the case. Lincoln tried to convince him it would cost much more than the debt was worth. But he persisted in suing and Lincoln told him the fee would be ten dollars.

Lincoln called the poor man in and give him half of the money. Then he had him go to the squire's office, confess judgment and pay the debt.

---

"Let us have faith, Mr. President," advised a minister, "that the Lord is on our side in this great war.

"That is not what is worrying me," said Lincoln, "I know the Lord is always on the side of the right and my prayer and anxiety is, that I and the nation be on the Lord's side."

One of Lincoln's political opponents loaned him a slow horse to go to a political convention, hoping he would not be able to arrive in time. However he did, and when he returned the horse he asked, "You keep this horse for funerals don't you?"

"Oh no," said the liveryman.

"Well I'm glad of that," declared Lincoln, "For if you did you'd never get a corpse to the cemetery in time for the resurrection."

---

Lincoln while President received terrific criticism about the way he was conducting the war. Most of it came from people who were not sincere in winning the war or were draft dodgers who made most of the noise.

"They remind me," said he, "of a man once lost in the woods at night when a terrific storm occurred. A flash of lightning hit so near he fell upon his knees. He was not a religious man but felt he had better pray for safety. 'Oh, God,' he began, 'it is not often I call upon Thee, but if it is all the same to Thee give us a little more light and a little less noise.'"

---

When Lincoln first became President, the office seekers were almost as much of a worry as the war. They overran the White House. While the future of the Union was in jeopardy and Lincoln had more than he could attend to he was always having to stop to see some office seeker. One day a member of his cabinet noticing that he was more dejected than usual asked,

"Is there anything gone wrong at the front?"

"No," said he in disgust, "It's only the postoffice at Brownsville."



Lincoln's mental ability continued to grow all his life. He hated social gatherings; he desired to be left at home with some good book. The State Library still has the old records of books he and his family borrowed. Note the difference between the quotes from these two speeches. This first from a speech delivered at Springfield shortly after he was admitted to the bar.

"If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of free men, we must live through all time or die by suicide. I hope I am not overwary; but if I am not, there is even now something of ill-omen amongst us."

Note how much more forceful is the famous speech he made in what is now the old court house of Springfield. He had reached his maturity and this last is a classic that will last as long as the English language.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all the one thing or the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest further spread of it and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction or its advocates will push it forward till it becomes alike lawful in all the states, old as well as new, North as well as South."

---

When Lincoln was defeated by Douglas for the Senate a friend asked him how he felt.

"To badly to laugh and to big to cry."



Once while in court trying a case, when Lincoln was reading a law that supported his side, he happened to read a little too far before he became aware of his mistake. He had also read a paragraph against his side.

"There, there, may it please the Court, I reckon I've scratched up a snake. But as I am in for it, I guess I'll read it through." He won the case in spite of his error.

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A confederate raid resulted in the capture of a brigadier general and over one hundred horses.

"Well I'm sorry for the horses," said Lincoln.

"Sorry for the horses, what about the general?" asked the Secretary of War.

"Oh, I can make a brigadier general in five minutes but it is not so easy to replace over one hundred horses." he replied.

---

Lincoln was looking at a very poor painting. An art student asked him to give his opinion of the picture,

"Why he is an excellent painter," answered Lincoln, "he carefully observes the Lord's commandments, for he hath not made unto himself the likeness of anything that is in the heavens above or is in the earth beneath or that is in the waters under the earth."

---

Alexander Stephens a commissioner from the deep south who had lunched with Grant and Lincoln had just left their presence. To protect himself from the severe northern winter he had put on an unusual amount of coats and pants.

"Did you ever see such a little nubbin with so many shucks?" asked Lincoln.

Lincoln once made an important speech at Bloomington. There were a number of newspaper reporters including Joseph Medill of the Chicago Tribune. The speech created so much excitement, cheering and clapping of hands the reporters joined in and forgot to take notes. When the speech closed they found they had nothing written, but had been so excited they could not recall enough of its contents to give a good report.

It has become known in history as Lincoln's lost speech in Bloomington.

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Most great and worth while lives have been born among almost unsurmountable difficulties and have become great because they were intelligent and industrious enough to overcome all difficulties. Just think what this old world would be if every body followed Lincoln's advice on property: —

“Property is the fruit of labor; property is desirable; it is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built.”

This is the strongest argument I have ever seen against communism which has confiscated so many farms, homes, and even lives in the nations gone communistic.

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Here is the last sentence Lincoln said to his friends when he left Springfield—

“To his care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.”



